

What U Need 2 Know

... before you hit the road

OK,

so you want to go abroad — you've picked your destination, promised your mom you'd send a postcard, and you're psyched to get moving. Now is the time to stop drooling over your atlas and face reality. There are a number of small but essential details that need to be taken care of before your friends can bid you *bon voyage*.

■ PASSPORT

Without a passport, you won't even be allowed to set foot on most foreign lands. Because a passport can take as long as four weeks to process, and sometimes even longer during the peak travel season from March to September, this is one of the first things to consider in making your travel plans. In an emergency, the Passport Agency can rush your application — for a substantial fee.

A passport is an official identification document issued by governments to their own citizens. (If you are not a U.S. citizen, contact the embassy of your country.) A U.S. passport for an adult over 18 is valid for 10 years. You have to apply in person at a federal or state court, authorized U.S. post office or a passport agency. Passport agencies can be found in Boston, Chicago,

Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, Stamford, Conn., or Washington, D.C.

When you arrive on the fateful day, you'll need to have with you:

1. Proof of U.S. citizenship. This can be a certified copy of your birth certificate, a naturalization certificate or, if you were born abroad, a consular report of birth of a U.S. citizen.

2. Two recent identical photographs, 2" by 2". These may be in color or black and white, but the background must be white, and your head should measure 1 3/8" from top to chin. Most photo places will print acceptable passport photos while you wait, but be prepared — they can be just as unflattering as driver's license photos.

3. Proof of identity. If you don't have a valid driver's license, you can use a previous U.S. passport, a certificate of naturalization or citizenship or recent government identification card.

4. A completed form DSP-11, "Passport Application." It's easy: Wherever you apply will have one, and it just takes a minute to fill out.

5. Payment. The current fee for a passport is \$55, plus a \$10 processing fee for first-time applicants. Again, be sure to call in advance. Some locations won't accept personal checks, and if you pay in cash you need exact change.

For more information, the government offers a brochure, *Your Trip Abroad*. Send \$1 to Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; (202) 783-3238.

■ VISA

There's more to travel than a passport and a smile. In order to travel to some countries, you also might need a visa, which is official permission to enter granted by the country you plan to visit. A visa appears deceptively simple — a cool stamp you receive before you leave, making you look worldly as you flip casually through your passport. But your visa is another detail you don't want to leave until the 11th hour. Processing a visa can take anywhere from a day to several weeks. Requirements vary from country to country, and the qualifications differ depending on what you plan to do and how long you plan to stay.

Contact the consulate of the country you plan to visit and ask for detailed visa information. Copies of *Foreign Visa Requirements* are available for 50 cents from The Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009; (719) 948-3334.

■ INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD

One advantage of being a student traveler is that you can get discounted prices on things like airfare, train tickets and theater seats. But quoting Aristotle, carrying textbooks or even showing your college ID often isn't valid proof of student status in other countries. Your best bet is to invest \$15 in an International Student Identity Card. You will have to show documentation that you're a student in order to get the card, but from then on, if anyone ever questions your student status, you can confidently flash 'em this cute, colorful little ID. Besides qualifying you for discounts, the International Student Identity Card gives you access to a 24-hour assistance hotline, plus sickness and accident insurance.

If you aren't a student but are under 26, or if you're a teacher, International Youth Identity Cards and International Teacher Identity Cards also are available with similar benefits.

For detailed information and an application, see the center section of this magazine.